

CHEROKEE COUNTY ASSUMPTION OF AUTHORITY PLANS

Cherokee County Sequencing:

What (in exact sequence order)	Who	When	Why is this important
Meet with DSS Director with DSS Board Chair	Michael, Lisa, Wayne, and Julie	3/19 at 8:00am	
Meet with Child Welfare Supervisors and Director and Business Office With member of DSS Board	Lisa, Michael, Wayne, Julie Bob Cochran Brian Vogl Lyn Osteen	3/19 at 8:45am	
Meet with Child Welfare Team @ CCDSS With DSS Board Chair	Lisa, Brian, Bob, Lyn	3/19 @ 9:30am	
Meet with County Manager	Michael and Julie	3/19 @ 10:00	
Meet with Chair of BOCC Chair	Michael and Julie	3/19 @	
Meet with DSS Board Chair			
Inform Eastern Band of Cherokee - who?	Michael or Mandy?	3/16	Not done - need to know who to call and who will make the call
Issue formal notice to County Commissioners (ALL), DSS Board Chair and all members, County Manager, current Director	Julie/Michael/Susan Drafting - will send to Mandy and Christen ASAP	3/16 Morning	In progress - should be done this evening 3/15 for review
Issue press statement	Chris	3/16 - after formal notice issued	Not started - need to coordinate with Governor's office
Develop and implement assumption of authority plan to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Director role coverage Child welfare lead Economic Services lead Other staffing/logistical needs Mechanism for 	Michael/Wayne Lisa/Susan	Beginning 3/15	In progress

withholding funding as appropriate during assumption of authority <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal communications and reporting structure • Exit strategy steps 			
Develop ongoing communications strategy	Chris/Susan	Beginning 3/16	Not started
ASSUME AUTHORITY OVER CHILD WELFARE OPERATIONS	DSS Team - initial visit will include Michael and Lisa who will meet with county leadership	3/19	

Key Message for Calls:

On December 14, DHHS became aware of the use of “custody and visitation agreements” (CVAs) used by the Cherokee County Department of Social Services in removing children from parents and placing them in other homes.

In response to this information, DSS sent out a Dear County Director Letter on December 20, 2017. This letter instructed all counties to cease the use of or facilitation of any private custody agreements without the oversight of the court system.

Additionally, we asked Cherokee County to conduct a thorough examination of all CPS cases dating back to 2008 to determine the number of cases where these CVAs were used. We memorialized this request in a follow-up letter to Cherokee County sent on January 24, 2018, and issued a subsequent Corrective Action Plan on March 14, 2018.

However, in the past 24 hours, we have obtained additional information that now makes it necessary for DHHS to invoke its authority under 108A-74(c) to take over control over DSS services in Cherokee County effective Monday, March 19. This decision is based on our evaluation that Cherokee County’s *“failure to provide services poses a substantial threat to the safety and welfare of children in the county who receive or are eligible to receive the services.”*

Information in the last two days includes:

- District court **Judge Tessa Sellers**. **Judge Sellers** presided over a hearing on February 28, 2018 which involved one of the CVAs. During the hearing there was testimony of various witness from Cherokee County DSS, including Attorney Lindsay and the **Director, Cindy Palmer**. Judge Sellers expressed that the information presented at this hearing was alarming and disturbing to her with regards to the operation of Cherokee County DSS. She said she received a case file for an in camera review that was a “disaster.” There were missing documents, disorganized documents and incomplete information contained in the case notes. Further, there was testimony presented at this

hearing that indicated CPS case files and documentation were being stored and kept by social workers off-site and in non-secure ways.

- **Yesterday, David Moore, the new Cherokee County DSS attorney contacted Julie Cronin.** He and the DSS Board are both concerned with the leadership and supervision of the child welfare system in Cherokee County, and also concerned with the capacity and ability of the current child welfare staff to do their job on a day-to-day basis.
- Mr. Moore has also informed Julie that a lawsuit was filed on March 14 in Cherokee County Superior Court. DHHS is not a named party to this action.

Contact Names & Numbers:

Cherokee Co Manager
Randy Wiggins
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Chair DSS Board (Cherokee County)
Karen Kephart
828-361-0206

Chair County Commission (Cherokee)
Dr. Dan Eichenbaum
828-494-7283

Senator Jim Davis (Cherokee Co.)
919-733-5875
828-342-4483

Rep. Kevin Corbin (Cherokee Co.)
919-733-5859
828-524-7799